



Community Conservation and Stewardship on Guemes Island

Skagit Land Trust (SLT or the Trust) recently added five acres to our Guemes Mountain and Valley Conservation Area. This addition reminded us how each step of conservation on Guemes has happened because of community and partnership. Coast Salish peoples have lived on Guemes Island -- known as *Qweng7qwengila7* in the Samish language -- from time immemorial. They have been long-time, careful stewards on Guemes and other coastal areas. The Samish Indian Nation's stewardship continues today as they undertake many projects to maintain and restore ecological health to our local ecosystems.

Following European settlement, land use and resource patterns changed, affecting both Indigenous communities and local ecosystems. With this transition, industry proposed various plans to develop the land. It's hard to believe that this enchanting place was considered as a site for an aluminum smelter as recently as the 1960s! Conservation-minded Guemes islanders, building on the foundation and long history of stewardship by the Coast Salish, foiled the aluminum plot with a rezoning challenge that went all the way to the Washington State Supreme Court. At a time when a wave of extreme industrialism threatened many beautiful places in Skagit County, this was a crucial victory.

Over recent decades, the Guemes community's conservation ethic and generosity have made many conservation projects happen -- including knitting together a Guemes Conservation Corridor of protected lands across the island. In the 1990's, landowners such as Joost Businger and others helped the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife secure a 39-acre wildlife sanctuary at Square Harbor. This sanctuary forms the eastern edge of the Guemes Conservation Corridor. Joost and his wife, Marianne Kooiman, and many other residents further expanded the corridor by placing conservation easements on their properties or donating land to the San Juan Preservation Trust (SJPT).

In 2009, islanders asked Skagit Land Trust to help them protect Guemes Mountain from development, when it was up for sale. Soon Guemes islanders, SLT, SJPT, and members of both organizations were working together to save the mountain.

"The Preservation Trust and Skagit Land Trust recognized this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to not only protect an iconic landscape, but to create a shoreline-to-mountaintop corridor that would help keep Guemes wild," recalls SJPT's Senior Director of Stewardship, Dean Dougherty. "While we expected it to be a difficult campaign, our strong

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partnership gave us confidence to take on the challenge.”

The two Trusts and a very active Steering Committee formed a joint “Guemes Forever” campaign. Donors gave generously (despite the financial strain of the recession) to purchase the mountain. A conservation easement was also placed on it. In 2010, SLT engaged the Washington Trails Association to install a path that has since ushered thousands of people up the mountain to enjoy breathtaking views once known by few.

Several additions to SLT’s Guemes Mountain and Valley Conservation Area have followed. In 2017, in the same valley where the aluminum power plant was planned, a generous landowner donated 127 acres of farmland and wetland habitat. Shortly thereafter, neighbors Win and Elaine Anderson donated a conservation easement to SLT, protecting 36 acres of Guemes Valley and Cayou Creek. Most recently, the Trust added another five acres of diverse, mature mountain forest.

Protecting Guemes shorelines has also been a priority. When sensitive beach and feeder bluffs faced potential development in 2018, over 450 families (as well as businesses, and state and federal grants) helped SLT purchase and protect Kelly’s Point. In 2022, landowner Anne Casperson donated a conservation easement that protected another 400 feet of rocky bluffs and shoreline. The SJPT has had similar generous gifts to preserve special shorelines, including at the Peach Preserve.

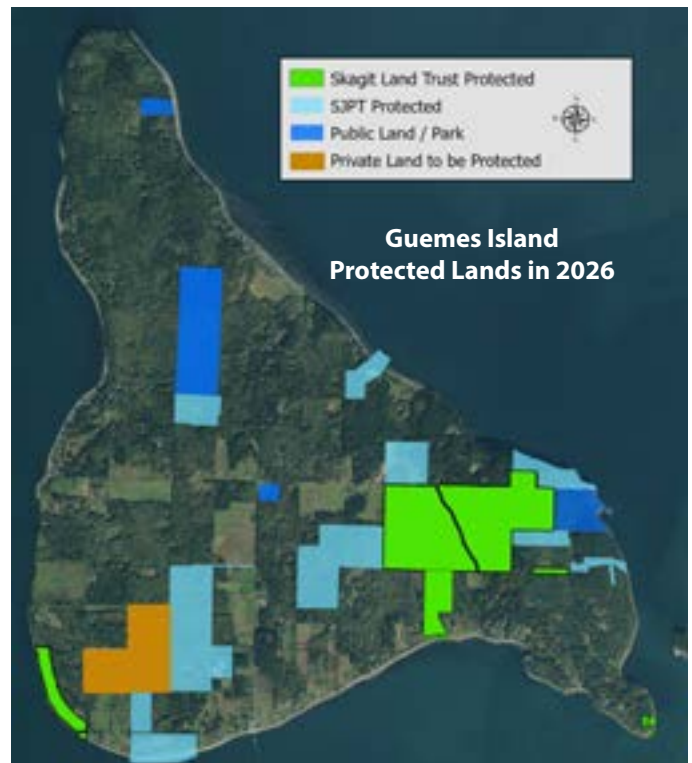
Thanks to these efforts from islanders, SLT members, partners, and tribal communities, Guemes remains a nature lover’s paradise of quiet forests, vibrant wetlands, and scenic views. The Trust is lucky to have several incredible Guemes Island land stewards who volunteer their time. They remove invasive species, plant native vegetation, pick up trash, install signs and benches, and build and maintain trails. Thank you to current and past lands stewards, including Ian Woofenden, Chris LeBoutillier, Ed & Carolyn Gestellum, Tony Allison, Kit Harma, Ron Lindsay, Therese Connolly, John Koon, and Donna Revard.

Over 1,000 acres on Guemes (nearly 20% of the island) have been permanently protected, and the story isn’t over yet. Near Kelly’s Point lies another 120 acres of forestland called Dog Woods that will eventually be conserved.

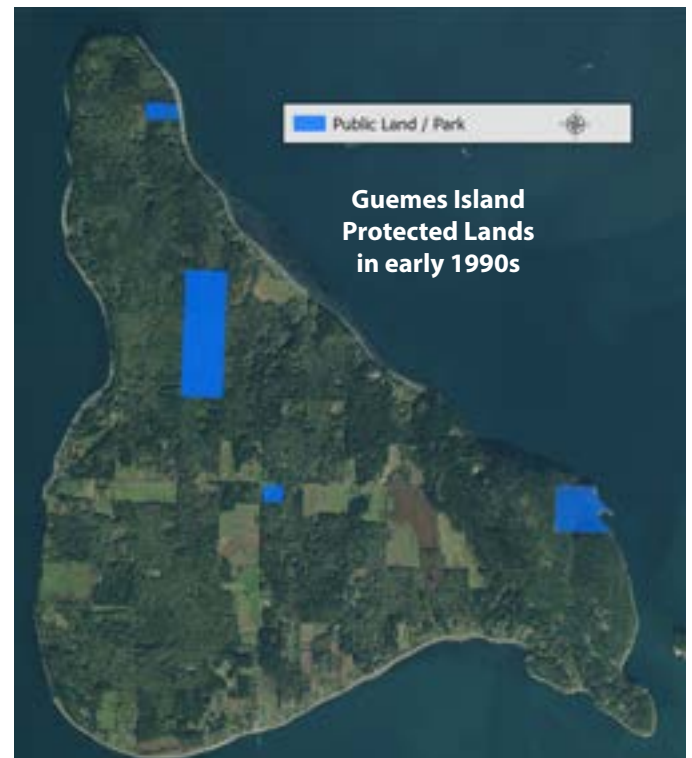
“Our vision for Dog Woods builds upon the strengths of both Skagit Land Trust and Coast Salish Youth Coalition to foster a love for the land, respect for the culture and traditions of its original stewards, and connection to the natural environment,” explain landowners Birch Beaudet and David Wertheimer, who have partnered with Coast Salish Youth Coalition (CSYC) to create a place for indigenous youth to learn and apply traditional ecological practices.

“We are excited to collaborate with Skagit Land Trust in shared stewardship on this landscape” says CSYC’s co-director Sam Barr. “This land has a long history of Coast Salish stewardship with our communities being a part of the land. We are grateful in returning these practices to Dog Woods, as we work to empower the next generation of culturally informed environmental stewards.” SLT looks forward to continuing this partnership at Dog Woods and on Guemes Island.

We’ll be celebrating Guemes’ conservation stories at our Lands We Love Social on June 6th – we hope to see you there!



Maps of protected lands on Guemes in 2026 (above) highlight conservation progress made since the early 1990s (below).



Lands We Love Social - June 6th on Guemes Island

Please join us for our **Lands We Love Social fundraiser on June 6th from 3-6pm at the Trust's Guemes Mountain & Valley Conservation Area.** Guests are encouraged to dress comfortably for this outdoor social. This festive fundraiser includes bites and beverages, live music, auction items, special excursion sign-ups, and a raise-the-paddle in support of local conservation and stewardship. **Tickets are at skagitlandtrust.org or 360-428-7878.**

Want to help make this event a success? Please email info@skagitlandtrust.org if you have any of the following:

- A cabin or boat ride that could be offered as an experience?
- A connection with a business that might donate a trip or tour?
- A special skill you'd like to share through an experiential excursion or workshop?

Thank You to Our Sponsors! We are grateful for their continued support.

Interested in sponsoring? Contact Laura Hartner, at laurah@skagitlandtrust.org.



Members Gather for 34th Annual Meeting

Over 120 Skagit Land Trust members and staff gathered at the Mount Vernon Library Commons last month to celebrate their accomplishments of the past year and to learn about future plans.

The program included a screening of the new short film *Changing Waters: Time for Action on Ocean Acidification*, as well as an ocean-acidification presentation from guest speakers Betsy Peabody, Chair of the Marine Resources Advisory Council, and Bill Dewey, Policy Director for Taylor Shellfish.

During the meeting, Skagit Land Trust gave awards to several generous volunteers and partners who went above and beyond in support our work this year:

*Conservation Awards: Ellen Rak & Bill Dunlap,
Mark & Diane Studley*

Outreach Award: Chris Varela

Development Award: Debbie Ensey

Stewardship Award: Dike District 5

Great Blue Heron Award: Karen Krub

To read more about the award recipients and see photos of the event, please visit our website: www.skagitlandtrust.org



Above: Members hear how they have supported local conservation in the past year. Below: Bill Dewey (left) and Betsy Peabody (center) answer questions on ocean acidification. SLT Conservation Project Manager Kari Odden (right) facilitated.



Executive Director's Letter

Dear Supporters of Skagit Land Trust,

I grew up believing wilderness meant land without people. Then that idea fell apart. In many places I came to know, people and culture were woven into even the wildest landscapes.

I deeply value our designated wilderness areas. Without legal protection, many would be gone or greatly diminished. We can't take them for granted. They're rare, and getting rarer. They're worth fighting for.

At the same time, working in conservation, I've come to see natural lands as alive with stories -- shaped by those who have lived on and with the land. In our work, we see how connection to place becomes responsibility. Landowners stop thinking of themselves as owners, and start thinking like stewards, caring for the land now, and passing it on with intention.

Cascadia Daily News recently published the story of Mary Brown Stewart – the bulb pioneer. Mary arrived on Samish Island in 1903 to land SLT now owns. Soon after, she ordered a boatload of bulbs and was the first person in the Skagit to start growing tulips as a business venture. Generations later, the family was thrilled to have Skagit Land Trust purchase this now-forested property. Mary's great-grandchildren, who relayed her story in the article, say that they "view perpetual stewardship as an ideal fate for the land she nurtured."

Indigenous histories stretch back thousands of years, grounded in relationship and coexistence with the land to this day. There's wisdom there about stewardship that we still have much to learn from.

This is one of the reasons I am so pleased that our community, Skagit County, and the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, had the support of the Upper Skagit Indian Nation to expand and protect Yudwasta Big Rock County Park. The property Skagit Land Trust bought and held, and an additional parcel donated by neighbors, were officially transferred to County Parks at the end of February. You can learn more about this project and its history on our website, by visiting the "Explore Our Lands" page.

Today's stories of conservation take place within a much older, deeper narrative. Skagit Land Trust also recently acquired a property that was once the mouth of the slough that joined Padilla and Alice Bays (pictured below). This property, which is in close proximity to *A7ts'iqen*, formerly a large Samish village, is part of a much larger history with many stories. Some are not easy stories, but they are important. The Samish Indian Nation's website has a history section with an excellent storyboard and timeline that is well worth visiting.

While it is critical to protect our most important natural lands, it doesn't end there. Stewardship deepens from caring for the land. It is a critical aspect of developing a conservation ethic and saving land for future generations of people and wildlife. You, as partners and members, are important stewards of the places we conserve. Thank you!



Molly Doran, Executive Director



Photo credit: MacKenzie Keen

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During GiveBIG you can ensure that next acre is conserved, the next mile of shoreline is protected, the next heron has an undisturbed place to raise their chicks, and the next child is inspired to care for the world around them.

Your gift will go **TWICE** as far thanks to a **\$25,000 match for all GiveBIG gifts**. Visit our website on or before May 5th to make your gift. **Thank you!**



Stewardship News

Skagit Land Trust is pleased to welcome Stewardship Coordinator **Muriel Troka** to our stewardship team. Raised in Concrete, Muriel developed an early appreciation for the region's ecosystems, which led her to pursue a degree in Environmental Policy from Western Washington University. She has contributed to riparian habitat restoration through her work with the Washington Conservation Corps and Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. Outside of work, Muriel can often be found exploring the outdoors with her dog, Bogey -- swimming, camping, canoeing, or searching for mushrooms and wildflowers.



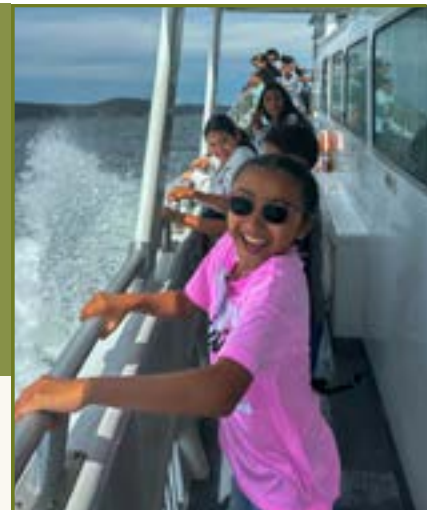
We also want to share that **Max Morange** has transitioned into a new part-time role as Conservation Easement Monitor. As Stewardship Director, Max blended science, partnerships, and thoughtful planning to ensure our lands were set up to thrive for generations. We are grateful for his leadership and delighted that he will remain on our team in this new capacity.



Our Stewardship Director position is now open. Please go to our website's Careers page for more information.

5% Friday with Skagit Land Trust & Kulshan Creek Community Youth Program!

Save your shopping for **May 22nd!** Skagit Valley Co-Op is donating 5% of the day's proceeds to help fund our Kulshan Creek Youth Program, which takes local youth on field trips to foster connections with the natural world and build a sense of place.



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Skagit Land Trust conserves wildlife habitat, agricultural and forest lands, scenic open space and shorelines for the benefit of our community and as a legacy for future generations.

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Upcoming Events

**Mulching & Maintenance Work Party
@ Day Creek Conservation Area**
Friday, May 8th @ 9am - 12pm

Hike with Jack Hartt @ Sharpe Park
Saturday, May 9th

**Garlic Mustard Removal Work Party
@ Pressentin Ranch**
Friday, May 22nd @ 10am - 2pm

**Lands We Love Social
@ Guemes Island**
Saturday, June 6th @ 3pm - 6pm

Please go to skagitlandtrust.org for more information and to sign up.



The lands conserved and protected by Skagit Land Trust have been inhabited and stewarded by numerous tribes and Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We recognize and respect the inherent, indigenous, and treaty rights of the Coast Salish People who have deep and abiding connections to these places. We seek to partner with local tribes as we conserve and care for these lands and waters.